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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIJING 003239

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2032

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KCRS](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: S/CRS AMBASSADOR HERBST CONSULTATIONS IN BEIJING

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Daniel L. Shields. Reasons
1.4 (b/d).

Summary

1. (C) China has the capability to be a vital contributor and partner in global reconstruction and stabilization (R/S) efforts, Ambassador John Herbst told officials from the Ministries of Foreign and Civil Affairs and representatives from Chinese think tanks April 27-28. In the meetings, Ambassador Herbst outlined the scope and focus of the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) and urged China to develop its R/S capabilities. Emphasizing that the United States is keen to cooperate with China in this area, Ambassador Herbst explored the possibility of conducting a workshop on R/S issues in Beijing in the near future. He stressed the potential benefit of developing a four-way grouping involving the United States, China, Japan and the ROK that could productively cooperate in global R/S hotspots. A roundtable of scholars at the PLA-affiliated Foundation for International Strategic Studies (FISS) responded favorably to the Ambassador's presentation, although some voiced concerns about the United States' motives. Admiral Yang Yi of the National Defense University provided the most upbeat assessment of S/CRS' proposals, noting that collaborating with the United States on R/S issues is "clearly in China's interest." Ministry of Foreign Affairs Deputy Director General for International Organizations Chen Xu expressed measured interest in S/CRS efforts and promised to report Ambassador Herbst's ideas to relevant officials. The S/CRS delegation also had a positive meeting with the Ministry of Civil Affairs. End Summary.

S/CRS: An Overview and an Invitation

2. (SBU) At the FISS roundtable that kicked off the visit and at subsequent meetings, Ambassador Herbst provided an overview of the S/CRS mission. He described the establishment of S/CRS, outlined the nature of its R/S efforts and stressed the importance of international coordination in this area. Drawing a distinction between the immediate role of humanitarian and disaster assistance and the longer and broader effort required to stabilize and reconstruct a failed

state or other at-risk area, Ambassador Herbst highlighted the dangers the international community faces in failing to address these issues. He observed that while the United States, Canada and some European countries are active in R/S efforts, China and the other large economies of Northeast Asia have not yet gotten involved in a coordinated way. Ambassador Herbst urged China to organize its R/S capabilities, adding that the United States and China should continue to discuss practical ways to cooperate on handling crises in the future. In addition, he explored the possibility of creating a four-way R/S framework involving the United States, China, Japan and the ROK. He suggested that for the time being, the four governments should aim for informal, working-level coordination rather than pursue a larger, more ambitious agreement.

The FISS Roundtable

13. (C) Chinese scholars participating in an April 27 roundtable at FISS, a People's Liberation Army-affiliated think tank, reacted favorably to the Ambassador's presentation on the whole, although several expressed doubts about United States' motives and methods. Among other issues, they expressed concern that:

- lack of a common vision and shared worldview that might hinder real partnership in dealing with international crises (Zhou Hong, Director of the Institute of European Studies at the China Academy of

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Social Sciences (CASS));

- R/S teams might receive a negative "label" by being associated with the United States if they participate in American-led efforts (Zhou); and

- absent agreed rules of conduct, R/S efforts may amount to little more than the pursuit of United States' national interests, without taking into account the interests of the region in question or of the international community (Lu Dehong, FISS Deputy Director of Research).

14. (C) Ambassador Herbst rejected these points, noting that the United States is not proposing to lead all R/S efforts or recruit other countries to join an American-led group. Rather, the objective is to encourage China to establish an R/S team with which S/CRS could then discuss potential cooperation. Whatever our views are on dealing with failed states or other crises, the United States and China share a number of common interests, including wanting to see continued global economic growth and stability. We should have a clear, easy way to discuss cooperation, so that when a crisis occurs, we can decide what our respective roles might usefully be.

15. (C) Despite voicing concerns, the scholars were generally upbeat about the S/CRS mission, with Zhou of CASS praising the United States for its recognition of the importance of civilian power in crisis resolution. Moreover, He Wenping, Senior Researcher at CASS' Institute of West Asian and African Studies, said the potential for bilateral cooperation on R/S issues is "huge," asserting that China has already done a great deal of productive work in this area in places such as Darfur and Afghanistan, even if China does not explicitly define the efforts as R/S deployments. China has a "strong capacity" and is "quite active" in the field of reconstruction, but is more willing to act under the leadership of the UN, said Huang Xiaomin of

the Ministry of National Defense (MND). In this context, MND has worked closely with China's Ministries of Commerce and Foreign Affairs to provide humanitarian assistance, mostly to natural disaster areas.

¶6. (C) The roundtable produced several "takeaways," said FISS' Zhang Tuosheng, who moderated the event. The United States' attempt to balance civilian and military roles in R/S operations is extremely positive, as many Chinese believe the United States has historically relied too much on military solutions. In addition, S/CRS's objective of seeking greater international cooperation, which is essential to solving crises, is encouraging. Zhang said the S/CRS emphasis on breaking down bureaucratic stovepipes within the United States Government has a particular resonance in China, where the government suffers from a lack of interagency coordination. In the future, Zhang concluded, he hopes China will have an entity similar to S/CRS, in part as a way to promote and expand China's "soft power."

Rear Admiral Yang: R/S "in China's Interest"

¶7. (C) At an April 27 working dinner, Rear Admiral Yang Yi, Director of Strategic Studies at China's National Defense University, lauded the S/CRS effort to engage with China on these issues, noting that expanding cooperation is "clearly in China's interest." He urged Ambassador Herbst to provide to the Chinese Embassy in Washington a detailed plan for future cooperation. Yang maintained that often proposals reach decisionmakers' desks more quickly if they come straight from the Embassy instead of going through standard bureaucratic channels in Beijing. In this context, he pledged to share his positive assessment of the S/CRS mission with his contacts in the government. The next step, Yang suggested, would be for S/CRS to conduct a workshop in Beijing with relevant Chinese government agencies. In any case,

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bilateral cooperation on R/S issues must precede any regional mechanism involving the Japanese and the South Koreans. Such high-profile combined efforts would likely arouse suspicions in the DPRK, Yang said.

MFA: Cautious Interest in S/CRS

¶8. (C) The response to Ambassador Herbst's presentation at the MFA was measured but positive. As China becomes more involved in R/S efforts, it needs to learn from the "best practices" of "major players," said DDG Chen Xu on April 27. The MFA's traditional structure of regional and functional bureaus does not include a counterpart for S/CRS. As for individual R/S projects, Chen said that while China remains a "developing country," it will continue to do what it can given its limited resources. But recognizing the importance of multilateral diplomacy in China's approach to foreign affairs, Chen assessed that the international community is increasingly looking to China to take on a "larger share" of global responsibilities. China has traditionally been slow to set up new institutions, Chen acknowledged, relating that China's change of heart about its initial reluctance to participate in UN peacekeeping operations took years.

¶9. (C) Nonetheless, Chen said that as Chinese interests abroad increase, the general trend will be for more Chinese integration globally, including in the area of emergency response, where the United

States has a better established process than China. China has been increasing its level of humanitarian relief for natural disasters, such as with its response to the Southeast Asia tsunami and to the Pakistan earthquake. This differs, however, from S/CRS activities, which have tended to focus on "war-torn areas," Chen remarked.

¶10. (C) Ambassador Herbst said S/CRS focuses on "man-made" crises, including but not limited to armed conflicts, rather than on natural disasters. Chen said that in any case, China may have a different understanding from other countries of some basic concepts associated with R/S, such as what constitutes a failed state in the first place. China views stabilization as an outcome of reconstruction whereas the United States may view stabilization as a political process, Chen claimed.

¶11. (C) Ambassador Herbst stressed that countries can play complementary roles in R/S and that it makes sense to work together even if the sides do not agree on every concept. Stabilization involves both procedural and tangible elements, such as training police forces or building roads. He offered to invite Chen and a Chinese delegation to Washington to discuss best practices and other ideas S/CRS is developing and to demonstrate training procedures. Chen expressed interest in the idea, without making a commitment. He was also noncommittal about Chinese participation in a possible four-way meeting on R/S issues with the United States, the ROK and Japan. He promised to "take stock and digest" the proposals and convey the ideas to other relevant MFA bureaus, including North American Affairs and Policy Planning.

Ministry of Civil Affairs

¶12. (C) DDG Pang of the Ministry of Civil Affairs Department of Disaster Relief provided an overview of his agency's operations, noting that China has accumulated considerable experience over the years in handling natural disasters. MCA's two main emergency response functions involve reconstruction of buildings and houses and provision of general assistance. While the ministry's focus is on domestic crises, MCA personnel traveled to Pakistan as part of China's assistance team in the wake of the earthquake there. Moreover, Chinese NGOs and Government-associated NGOs (such as the China Charity Foundation) work in tandem

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with the Ministry of Commerce and the MFA to provide aid to stricken areas around the globe.

¶13. (C) Within China, local governments take the lead in disaster response, while the MCA tends to play a coordinating role, providing assistance as necessary, Pang continued. In addition, the MCA has developed 17 professional teams that deploy to crisis sites to analyze the situation and collect data. Pang responded positively to Ambassador Herbst's suggestion that MCA officials participate in a possible future workshop in Beijing on R/S issues. However, Chai Mei, DDG of the MCA Foreign Affairs Office, interjected that MCA's main function is handling domestic crises. As such, expanding cooperation with the United States in that area would be more appropriate than exploring potential cross-border efforts, she said.

¶14. (U) S/CRS cleared this message.
RANDT